

Old State Powder Magazine
Charleston, South Carolina

HABS No. 13-13

HABS
SC
13-CHAR,
67-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 13

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Samuel Lapham, District Officer
42 Broad St. Charleston, S. C.

HABS
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STATE POWDER MAGAZINE
and
Administration Buildings
Charleston, Charleston County
South Carolina

Owner: Seaboard Air Line Railroad.

Date of Erection: 1826 (text); 1820-30 (card).

Architect: Robert Mills.

Builder:

Present Condition: Some buildings in ruin, others going to ruin.

Number of Stories: Administration Buildings, two; magazines, one.

Materials of Construction: Brick and stucco.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

STATE POWDER MAGAZINE
CHARLESTON, S. C.

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SURVEY NO. 13-13

This group of magazines for the storage of public and private powder (resembling a collection of assorted pill boxes) was constructed in 1826 by Robert Mills, on an island in the northeast portion of the city of Charleston. At that time this island, formed by Town Creek, New Market Creek and the marshes adjacent to same, was accessible only by water. Today, due to the reclamation of the marsh land and the increased alluvial deposits in the New Market Creek bed on account of the filling in of its northern and western branches, the site is now part of the mainland.

There were originally nine magazines, an officers' house and a barracks combined with a gateway. Two magazines have been destroyed when the Seaboard Air Line's right of way was run through the property, and the remaining seven are in various stages of dilapidation. The barracks and officers' quarters are in ruins with practically only one gable end of each building rising to the original height.

Mills' account of these magazines in his "Statistics" gives the impression that the barracks were constructed in combination with a gateway, which formed the eastern boundary of the magazine section proper and which was continued with a wall of some nature around all the magazines. Traces of this wall have now entirely disappeared, although the barracks ruin shows fragments of two Roman arches down its

center, which would indicate the gateway. The existing gate posts and wall fragments at the western end of the magazine enclosure, as shown on the plot plan, are not mentioned in his account, but may have been the water entrance for unloading the powder when brought to the site by boat.

The central (larger) magazine has a supporting center column of brick work, carrying a mushroom brick vault (see photograph). The outer roof of this central magazine has vanished. Mills stated, however, that it was a "bomb proof" roof. The six smaller magazines have no central pier, the parabolic brick vaults springing from the circular exterior walls without any central support. Their construction is of brick, stuccoed on the exterior, all the doors trimmed with brownstone. The round thimble ventilators over the doors are cut out of brownstone, while the other ventilators at the quadrant points are rectangular openings in the brick work, having a traverse to prevent a direct passage to the outside. The roofs are of slate carried on wood joists, which in turn rest on the brick vaults.

Mills states in his "Statistics" that the large central magazine was for the public powder and had a capacity of four thousand kegs; the smaller ones had a capacity of one thousand kegs and were to be assigned to different importers of powder.

The magazines are now owned by the Seaboard Air Line Railroad.

Sources of Material: "Statistics of South Carolina", by
Robert Mills
"Robert Mills, Architect", by
C. C. Wilson, in the Bulletin of the
University of South Carolina, No. 77,
February, 1919.

Data by Dist. Officer
Approved

James H. Hester

District Officer #13

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.